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ABSTRACT

Alcoholism is an almost universal problem which varies in nature and extent from culture to culture. To discriminate between French and American students on the basis of measured attitudes toward alcohol, American college students (N=291) and French college students (N=308) completed attitude measures for alcohol derived from a 14 scale semantic differential. The scales contained adjective pairs representative of evaluative (e.g., pleasant-painful), potency (e.g., strong-weak), and activity (e.g., complex-simple) dimensions. Analyses of results showed that the nationality of 79 percent of all students was correctly assigned by variable-profile analysis. The sociable-unsociable scale made the greatest contribution to overall discrimination, followed by the serious-humorous pairs. French students rated alcohol as more pleasant, more humorous, more gentle, and less passive than their American counterparts. Americans rated alcohol as sociable, while the French rated it as neutral, suggesting possible cultural differences in alcohol function for the two populations. (WAS)

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A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES TOWARD ALCOHOL AMONG FRENCH AND UNITED STATES COLLEGE STUDENTS

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A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES TOWARD ALCOHOL AMONG FRENCH AND UNITED STATES COLLEGE STUDENTS

Alcoholism is an almost universal problem which varies in nature and extent from culture to culture (Fleck, 1970). This study sought to discriminate between French and United States subjects on the basis of measured attitudes toward alcohol. Reported consumption of absolute alcohol in the French population is more than twice that of the United States population with an average per capita consumption of 22.25 liters per person 15 years old and older for 1972 (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1981).

There is reason to believe that attitudes towards drugs can reflect parameters of drug use. Veevers (1971) found correlations ranging from .48 to .99 between attitudes towards alcohol consumption and reported drinking behavior. Halpin and Whiddon (1977), using the semantic differential as an attitude measure, found correlations ranging from .39 to .72 between attitudes and drug use and concluded that attitudes toward alcohol, amphetamines, barbiturates, heroin, LSD, marijuana, and tobacco were substantially related to

the use of each respective drug. Sadoun, Lolli and Silverman (1965) found attitudes to be closely related to personal drinking habits in the French population: 63 percent of the heavy drinkers considered wine indispensable for the heavy laborer, as opposed to only 15 percent of the lower alcohol consumers. However, a review of relevant literature reveals scant research in the area of cross-cultural comparisons of attitudes toward alcohol.

The use of the semantic differential as an attitude measure in drug-use research has been advocated by various researchers. Among its research uses, the semantic differential has been employed to study perceptual dynamics of drug addicts (Rudin, 1972), semantic representations of drug terms by industrial workers (Baron & Galizio, 1978), attitudes toward alcohol and alcoholism among professionals and nonprofessionals (Kilty, 1975), stereotyping by children of the effects of drinking on adults (Isaacs, 1977), and relationships between drug attitudes and drug use (Halpin & Whiddon, 1977). Simpson and Koenig (1975) found the semantic differential to be a valid technique for measuring attitudes towards drug use, attitudes towards persons associated with drug use and abuse, and attitudes toward drug-related behavior.

The reliability of the semantic differential as an instrument for the comparative study of cultures has been established (Tanaka, Oyama, & Osgood, 1963; Osgood, 1964). Three factors derived from factor analytic studies were found to predominate among most cultures though some specificity was obtained in the ratings of concepts as evidenced by distinct loadings of the adjective pairs as a function of each culture.

Method

Attitude measures for alcohol were derived from a 14 scale semantic differential. The scales (adjective pairs), shown in Table 1, are representative of the evaluative, potency, and activity dimensions reported by Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) from their factor analytic studies. Three of the adjective pairs have been labeled situational because factor loadings vary consistently according to the concept to be evaluated (Isaac & Michael, 1980). On each scale a score of four is neutral, a score less than four is associated with the first member of the pair and a score greater than four is associated with the second member.

English and French versions of a semantic differential were developed for this study. The English version of the instrument was administered to 291 college students enrolled during 1982 in two universities in

Louisiana. The French version was translated from English by a bilingual graduate student of French nationality and approved by the chairman of the Psychology Department at the University of Lille. In January, 1982, the French version of the instrument was given to 308 introductory psychology students enrolled at the University of Lille in Northern France. In order to determine which of the 14 scales comprising the semantic differential were the best discriminators of nationality, the data were analyzed by means of discriminant analysis. The objective of discriminant analysis is to form a linear combination of the discriminating variables in such a manner as to render the groups as statistically different as possible.

Results and Discussion

The discriminant function calculated was found to be statistically significant at the .001 level of confidence as can be seen in Table II (C_r = .59, Wilk's lambda = .65, X^2 = 226.42, df = 11, $p < .001$). A stepwise entry of variables was employed in an attempt to produce an optimal set of discriminating variables. Eleven of the 14 adjective pairs analyzed remained after the final step. These variables are presented in Table IV along with the corresponding F-to-remove values. These values indicate which

variables made the greatest contribution to overall discrimination above and beyond the contributions already made by other variables (Klecka, 1980). The sociable-unsociable scale made the greatest contribution to overall discrimination, followed by the serious-humorous pair. The third and fourth greatest contributors were, respectively, the hot-cold and pleasant-painful scales. The assignment of subjects to groups (nationality) by variable-profile analysis resulted in 79 percent of all subjects being correctly assigned by nationality. As can be seen in Table III assignment accuracy was approximately equal for both nationalities.

The French subjects rated alcohol as more pleasant, more humorous, more gentle, and less passive than did the American subjects. These findings are consistent with expectations based on previous research and population use. Alcohol was rated as more sociable and as less dark by the American subjects than by the French respondents. The French students did not rate alcohol as unsociable, however, but rather in a neutral manner (mean score = 4.064; see Table VI), a finding suggesting possible cultural differences in the function alcohol serves for the two populations. Alcohol

consumption in the United States may be more closely tied to social occasions than in France where alcohol may be used in a greater variety of situations, such as with meals. Further research focussing on patterns of alcohol consumption among both populations would be useful in clarifying cultural differences in view of the sociability of alcohol.

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Table 1

Scales Transposed and Grouped by Dimensions

Evaluative:	Pleasant - Painful
	Sociable - Unsociable
	Gentle - Cruel
	Graceful - Awkward
	Bright - Dark
Potency:	Serious - Humorous
	Masculine - Feminine
	Strong - Weak
Activity:	Hot - Cold
	Complex - Simple
Miscellaneous (situational):	Flexible - Rigid
	Happy - Sad
	Relaxed - Tense

Table 2

Summary Table

Function	Eigenvalue	Canonical Correlation	Wilk's lambda	df	Chi-Squared
1	.54	.59	.65	11	226.42*

*Chi-squared calculated on Wilk's lambda found to be significant at the .001 level of confidence.

Table 3

Subject Classification Table

Actual Group	Number of Cases	Predicted Group Membership 1	2
Group 1 - French	295	237	58
		80%	20%
Group 2 - American	242	53	189
		22%	78%

Overall accuracy of prediction: 79%

Table 4

Variables in the Analysis After the Final Step

Variables	F-To-Remove
Pleasant-Painful	15.02
Sociable-Unsociable	61.07
Serious-Humorous	48.08
Gentle-Cruel	1.42
Graceful-Awkward	6.03
Active-Passive	10.21
Flexible-Rigid	3.24
Bright-Dark	2.24
Happy-Sad	3.12
Relaxed-Tense	2.54
Hot-Cold	35.09

Table 5

Univariate F Table

(1 and 533 Degrees of Freedom)

Variable	Wilk's lambda	
Pleasant-Painful	0.97	15.39 ***
Sociable-Unsociable	0.93	35.29 ***
Serious-Humorous	0.86	86.24 ***
Gentle-Cruel	0.98	7.78 **
Graceful-Awkward	0.99	1.41
Active-Passive	0.97	12.51 ***
Flexible-Rigid	0.99	1.01
Bright-Dark	0.98	5.91 *
Happy-Sad	0.99	0.99
Relaxed-Tense	0.99	0.81
Masculine-Feminine	0.99	0.19
Hot-Cold	0.86	82.77 ***
Complex-Simple	0.99	2.25
Strong-Weak	0.99	0.48

***p < .001

**p < .01

*p < .05

Table 6

Mean Scores on Each Scale for Both Groups

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
French	3.22	4.06	4.78	4.46	5.26	3.89	3.66
American	3.80	3.12	3.38	4.84	5.42	3.26	3.51

	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
French	4.82	3.82	2.86	3.50	2.58	3.79	3.46
American	4.45	3.80	2.72	3.55	3.85	3.54	3.42

Key to the scales:

1. Pleasant-Painful
2. Sociable-Unsociable
3. Serious-Humerous
4. Gentle-Cruel
5. Graceful-Awkward
6. Active-Passive
7. Flexible-Rigid
8. Bright-Dark
9. Happy-Sad
10. Relaxed-Tense
11. Masculine-Feminine
12. Hot-Cold
13. Complex-Simple
14. Strong-Weak